

Message Text

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43

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

IO-10 /070 W

----- 069630

R 061219Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9552

CINCPAC HON

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 0207

HW UDORN 5 DTD JAN 5 1975 RPTD FOR YOUR INFO:

P R 051730Z JAN 75

FM AMCONSUL UDORN

TO RUMTBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 1812

INFO RUMJIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 254

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 005

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJ: THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN KORAT PROVINCE

SUMMARY: CAMPAIGNING IN KORAT HAS INCREASED IN TEMP OVER THE PAST WEEKS. AS IN PREVIOUS ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, MONEY AND PERSONALITIES ARE TAKING PRECEDENCE OVER ISSUES. TO BOTH URBAN AND RUTAL CONSTITUENCIES ALIKE, THE U.S. PRESENCE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE A FACTOR. THE CONSERVATIVE THAI NATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTIES WILL PREDOMINATE WHILE THE SOCIAL-ISTS WILL GARNER TWO SEATS AT MOST. DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHOONHAVAN IS THE SINGLE MOST PROMINANT CANDIDATE AND HAS BEEN IN KORAT CITY, HIS CONSTITUENCY, SEVERAL TIMES TO PROMOTE HIS AND THE THAI NATION PARTY'S CHANCES. A DICHOTOMY EXISTS BETWEEN THE URBAN AND RURUAL CONSTITUENCIES, CONFIDENTIAL

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WITH THE FORMER MORE SOPHISTICATED AND LESS SUSCEPTIBLE TO

FINANCIAL INDUCEMENTS. FOR THESE CITY FOLK THE PERSONALITY OF CHATCHAI AND A DESIRE TO MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO APPEAR IMPORTANT. THE RURAL VOTER IS LIKELY TO BE INFLUENCED BY PARTY-FUNDED CONTRIBUTIONS TO VILLAGE WELFARE PROJECTS, AND WHILE HE MAY LISTEN SYMPATHETICALLY TO CANDIDATES DENOUNCING THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ECONOMY, HE IS LIKELY TO VOTE ALONG LINES PROSCRIBED BY MONEY AND INFLUENCE. EITHER WAY, IT ADDS UP TO CONSERVATIVE, STATUS-QUO PARTIES TAKING THE LION'S SHARE OF SEATS, AND BUSINESS AS USUAL.

Q. CAMPAIGNING IN KORAT HAS INCREASED IN TEMPO OVER THE PAST WEEKS, AND THE SCURRY FOR SUPPORT IS TAKING DIFFERENT FORMS. KORAT WILL ELECT ELEVEN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OUT OF 117 CANDIDATES. HOWEVER, THE SCRAMBLE FOR SEATS WILL REALLY BE BETWEEN 19 SIGNIFICANT CANDIDATES, MOST REPRESENTING CONSERVATIVE ESTABLISHMENT PARTIES. MONEY AND PERSONAL LOYALTIES APPEAR TO BE THE DOMINANT FACTORS, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE PLAYING DIFFERENT ROLES IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS. OUTSIDE OF THESE, ISSUES ARE LACKING. WITH KORAT CONTAINING ONE OF THE U.S.'S LARGEST BASES AND THE URBAN POPULACE PROFITING SUBSTANTIALLY THEREFROM, CAMPAIGN ANTI-AMERICANISM IS DISTINCTLY MUTED. THE RURAL FOLK ARE DEFINITELY LESS AWARE OF THE U.S. PRESENCE. OTHER POSSIBLE ISSUES, SUCH AS GOVERNMENT INEPTNESS OR THE ECONOMY WILL MOVE AN AUDIENCE TO AN UNDERSTANDING MOOD, BUT SEEM TO POSSESS LITTLE POTENTIAL FOR THE BALLOT BOX.

2. A NOTICEABLE DICHOTOMY EXISTS BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL CONSTITUENCIES. KORAT CITY RESIDENTS TELL US THAT CITY PEOPLE ARE TOO SOPHISTICATED TO BE BOUGHT WITH TEA MONEY. THUS THE STRATEGY SEEMS TO INCLUDE LINING UP IMPORTANT PERSONAGES THROUGH PERSONAL LOYALTIES AND ANTICIPATION OF FUTURE GAIN, WHO WILL IN TURN ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE. IN THIS, THE DOMINANT FIGURE IS MAJOR GENERAL AND DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHOONHAVAN. CHATCHAI IS ASSISTED BY THAI NATION PARTY CANDIDATE AND FORMER MP PRAPHAT INDRAKAMHENG. CHATCHAI'S PRESENT STATUS, HIS KORAT ORIGINS, GOOD REPUTATION THEREIN AND THE FACT THAT HIS FATHER WAS ONCE COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE 2ND RTA ALONG WITH PRAPHAT'S STRONG POSITION LOCK UP TWO SEATS IN THE MUNICIPAL CONSTITUENCY AND PROVIDE THE IMPETUS TOWARD A THIRD THERE

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AND ADDITIONAL SEATS THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE. IN ADDITION, IT IS RUMORED THAT CHATCHAI AND MAJOR GENERAL PREM TINSULANON, CO 2ND RTA WILL SUPPORT CHATCHAI AND THE THAI NATION PARTY IN RETURN FOR A FUTURE POSITION IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

3. AN ADDED FACTOR IN THE MUNICIPAL CONSTITUENCY COULD BE SUPPORT FROM THE SINO-THAI COMMUNITY. THE MOST RECENT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS SAW SIX SINO-THAI ELECTED, AND AMONG THE

DEFEATED WERE EDITORS OF THE FIVE LOCAL KORAT NEWSPAPERS. TWO OF THESE PAPERS ARE STRIDENTLY ANTO-AMERICAN AND CAME OUT WITH ANTI-CHINESE ARTICLES DURING THE ELECTION. NOT ONLY DID THE VOTERS APPARENTLY REJECT BOTH OF THESE THEMES, BUT WHEN THE SINO-THAI RESPONDED BY CANCELLING ADVERTISING, THE PAPERS PRINTED A PUBLIC APOLOGY. THE SUCCESS OF THE SINO-THAI MAY WELL ENHANCE THE FORTUNES OF PEOPLE'S JUSTICE CANDIDATES, AMONG THEM SOMPHON KEYURAPHAN AND MANUM SANTIWONG. HOWEVER, PEOPLE'S JUSTICE IS MADE UP OF TEOCHIEU CHINESE WHILE KORAT'S CLOUT IS WIELDED BY HAKKA CHINESE, WHO CAN BE EXPECTED TO HEDGE THEIR BETS WITH AN EYE MOST GENERALLY TOWARDS A STATUS QUO OUTCOME.

4. IN THE RURAL AREAS, WHERE THE ELECTORATE IS MORE APATHETIC, UNTUTORED AND MALLEABLE, CANDIDATES ARE GERNERING SUPPORT BY CONTRIBUTING FUNDS FOR VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS-- ROAD CONSTRUCTION, SCHOOL REPAIR AND WAT REFURBISHMENT. OFTEN THIS IS PARALLELED BY OBTAINING THE SUPPORT OF A TAMBON HEADMAN, VILLAGE CHIEF OR SCHOOL OFFICIAL, WHO, IN ADDITION TO OCCUPYING A LOCAL POSITION OF TRUST, WILL PLAY AN OFFICIAL ROLE IN THE ELECTION.

5. THIS PATTERN IS NOT ALL OF THE PIECE, HOWEVER, IN THE BUA YAI CONSITUENCY, SOCIALIST CANDIDATES PRASAN MARUKHAPHITHAK AND KHAMRING SINOL ARE RECEIVING WIDESPREAD SUPPORT IN SPITE OF THEIR LACK OF MONEY. IN FACT, ONE REPORT WAS THAT VILLAGERS WERE CONTRIBUTING THEIR FUNDS TO PRASAN' CAMPAIGN, AND THA THEY BOTH STAND A GOOD CHANCE TO BE ELECTED. WHILE WE CANNOT FULLY EXPLAIN THIS, PART OF THE REASON SEEMS TO BE THAT BOTH ARE LOCALLY KNOWN FIGURES, PRASAN MARUKHAPHITHAK BECOMING EVEN MORE OF ONE WITH HIS RECENT STORY OF ATTEMPTED CIA-RECRUITMENT. WHAT DOES SEEM CLEAR THOUGH, IS THAT PARTY DOCTRINE AND ISSUES PLAY A SMALL ROLE.

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6. ONE ELEMENT IN THE KORAT CAMPAIGN IS NOTICEABLE FOR ITS ABSENCE. THAT IS STUDENT ACTIVISM OR ANY TYPE OF MEANINGFUL STUDENT EFFORT TO PROMITE CANDIDATES OR EXPOSE CAMPAIGN IRREGULARITIES. IN SPITE OF PAST STUDENT ACTIVISM IN KORAT AND PREDICTIONS OF A WATCHDOG ROLE, AS ELECTION DAY APPROACHES STUDENTS HAVE YET TO BE HEARD FROM IN ANY SIGNIFICANT WAY.

7. A FINAL ELEMENT, WHICH REMAINS UNCLEAR, IS THAT OF VIOLENCE. THERE ARE SOME STORIES OF ARMED BODYGUARDS AND POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS, AND FORECASTS OF MORE AS THE CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO A CLOSE. BUT SO FAR VIOLENCE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE A NOTABLE ASPECT OF THE KORAT CAMPAIGN.

8. EVEN TAKIN INTO ACCOUNT POSSIBLE SOCIALIST SUCCESS IN

THE BUA YAI CONSTITUENCY, A LOOK AT KORAT'S ELECTION NOW
APPEARS TO AUGUR PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION COMPOSED
PRIMARILY OF ESTABLISHMENT PARTIES, LED BY THE THAI NATION.
THE INGREDIENTS SEEM TO BE BAHT AND PERSONAL LOYALITES
AND, ALL IN ALL, THE FUTURE SPEAKS WELL FOR BUSINESS AS
USUAL.

9. LISTED BELOW BY ELECTORAL DISTRICT ARE 19 LEADING
CANDIDATES. THERE ARE MORE LEADING CANDIDATES THAN SEATS, BUT
THIS IS AS CLOSE AS WE CAN GUESS IT.

10. FIRST DISTRICT (INCLUDES KOORAT CITY)--TO ELECT 3
MG CHATCHAI CHOONHAVAN--THAI NATION
PRAPHAT INTHARAKAMHENG--THAI NATION
PRATHIN KHONGRITSUKSAKON--THAI NATION
SOMPHON KEYURAPHAN--PEOPLE'S JUSTICE
SAWANG UNAPHROM--SOCIAL JUSTICE
SUWAN THANAKANYA--SOCIAL JUSTICE

11. SECOND DISTRICT (INCLUDES PIMAI)--TO ELECT 3
BUNTHAN DOKTHAISONG--SOCIAL JUSTICE
ONGART TANGSATHITCHAI--PEOPLE'S JUSTICE
PRAYONG CHATAWARAHA--THAI NATION
CHALEOM PHOKKHAYASUNTHON--THAI NATION

12. THIRD DISTRICT (INCLUDES BUA YAI)--TO ELECT 3
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NOI THINNARAT--SOCIAL AGRIANS
KHAMKONG SINOK--SOCIALIST PARTY
PRASAN MARUKHAPHITHAK--SOCIAL PARTY
CAPT TEMSAK CHANGLAW--RESTORATION PARTY

13. FOURTH DISTRICT (INCLUDES PAK CHONG)--TO ELECT 2
RUB CHANWICHIT--SOCIAL NATIONALIST
MANUM SANTIWONG--PEOPLE'S JUSTICE
SA-NGUA PHAOTHONGSUK--SOCIAL JUSTICE
MONGKOHN SUKHONKHACHON--THAI NATION
CHAN CHUMMUANGPAK--THAI NATION. BIGELOW UNQT
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, ELECTION FORECASTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO00207
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750005-0077
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750177/aaaacpka.tel
Line Count: 213
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 JUL 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <20 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN KORAT PROVINCE SUMMARY: CAMPAIGNING IN KORAT HAS INCREASED IN TEMP OVER
TAGS: PINT, TH
To: STATE DIA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006